

## King Lists and Genealogies in the Hebrew Bible and in Southern Africa

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### ABSTRACT

*King lists and genealogies are used in this article as a point of reference from which to consider similarities between the historiographical perspectives of early Israel and traditional Africa, with special reference to the Lemba people of Southern Africa. Several Lemba king lists / clan lists and genealogies are examined, and compared with similar texts from the Hebrew Bible. Interesting findings include the unusual brevity of the Lemba genealogies in comparison with both Ancient Near Eastern and other African genealogies, and a cultural paradigm occurring both in Genesis and in Lemba texts, where the heir to a father's leadership is not his oldest son but rather the son of the pre-eminent wife.*

### A INTRODUCTION

Genealogies and king lists are important aspects of the oral historiography of various South African peoples.<sup>1</sup> They are also found in written form in the Hebrew Bible. In this study a few aspects of the historiography of early Israel as evidenced in the genealogies and king lists in the Hebrew Bible will be compared with the genealogical material of the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa, concentrating particularly on the Lemba. The term “genealogy” will be used in this article to refer to any such material, either genealogies proper or king lists. Hasel<sup>2</sup> says that genealogies and king lists are two distinct genres (at least in the Ancient Near East), and this is true. However, the term “genealogy” may be used by oral historians to refer to both: as Henige says, “Genealogies can be lists of rulers or no more than a line of direct ancestors going back to

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<sup>1</sup> D. Henige, *Oral historiography*. (London: Longman, 1982), 97. This book gives a general overview of oral historiography, covering a large number of different cultures. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Ancient Near East are both discussed. However, Henige (p. 92) is extremely distrustful of theories about African tribes with Semitic ancestry. See also below in my article.

<sup>2</sup> George F. Hasel, “The genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 and their alleged Babylonian background.” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 16(1978): 374. Hasel provides a specialised study of the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 and their possibility to be related in some way to Babylonian texts of a similar type. Its main use in this article was as an example of a study of Ancient Near Eastern genealogies.

some desired point of origin.”<sup>3</sup> Certainly in the relatively short history of the Lemba as we know it, it is difficult to distinguish between the two.

The Lemba tribe of Southern Africa have been the subject of a number of studies due to several unique features which lead many researchers to believe that they may be of Semitic descent. This study may be able to ascertain whether any aspects of their historiography – especially their genealogical material – may be said to corroborate this possibility by exhibiting similarities to the historiographical methods of the early Israelites as found in the Hebrew Bible.

## **B AFRICAN AND EARLY ISRAELITE HISTORIOGRAPHY**

The term “historiography” is ambiguous and has several possible meanings. Carena<sup>4</sup> says, for instance, that

when the term “Medieval historiography” is used, some mean the works written by the historians of the Middle Ages; others think of the works that contemporary historians devote to the Middle Ages; others the contemporary works dealing with the study of the Medieval historians.

For the purposes of this article the working definition of historiography would have to be close to the third option: something like “the study of the historical methods of the mediaeval historians.” Of course, this could go on for ever – like mirrors reflecting each other. When historiography is mentioned in this study it may be defined as a culture’s way of “doing history” – of recording it and interpreting it. Working from this basis, then, when a “historiographical paradigm” is mentioned, what is intended is a paradigm which the people of a particular culture used in order to understand, and write, history. It can be seen as a sort of conceptual lens for viewing the past.

What similarities exist between Early Israel’s way of “doing history” and that of pre-colonial Africa? T. J. Mafico in his 1982 article *Jewish tradition and African religion* speaks of the “striking parallels”<sup>5</sup> between the cultures of

<sup>3</sup> Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 97.

<sup>4</sup> O. Carena, *History of the Near Eastern historiography and its problems: 1852-1985. Part One: 1852-1945*. (Alter Orient und Altes Testament. 218/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 1989), 1. Carena provides a theoretical background of the study of historiography. Although his book focuses specifically on the Ancient Near East, the most useful part of the book for the purposes of this article turned out, strangely enough, to be the very beginning, which is more general. As the quote above shows, Carena succinctly gets to the very heart of the confusion surrounding the definition of the discipline of historiography.

<sup>5</sup> T. J. Mafico, “Jewish tradition and African religion.” *Patterns of prejudice* 16/3(1982):17.

early Israel and traditional Africa. Particularly important for the purposes of this study are his notes on the importance of ancestry in both cultures. To the Hebrews, their common genealogical origin was the source of their unity and even of their faith in God, as seen in phrases such as “the God of our fathers” (אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ) and “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם). The importance of ancestry is expressed in historiography by genealogies. In African culture, too, ancestry is important, and one’s ancestors are also seen as a link to God.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, genealogies are also very important in African historiography. It is very important for scholars to note the degree of similarity that exists between the Ancient Near Eastern and the traditional African cultures – they are much closer to each other than either is to modern Western culture. Mafico notes that the lack of this realisation has been a serious shortcoming among Christian missionaries to Africa,<sup>7</sup> and Le Roux points out the tremendous possibilities in the field of Old Testament Studies that could be opened up by such an approach.<sup>8</sup> The juxtaposition of a few genealogical texts in an attempt to compare historiographic paradigms is a small start to this approach. It is highly likely that this methodology will yield a number of similarities and parallels. The question that we are left with is whether any of these similarities may be attributed to more than the general correspondence between cultures, and that is a much more difficult question, one to which there are no really clear answers.

## C THE LEMBA

The Lemba people of northern South Africa and southern Zimbabwe have fascinated many scholars due to several unique features. Traditionally, they live in small isolated groups among other tribes, especially the Venda,<sup>9</sup> speaking the languages of the people they live among,<sup>10</sup> but retaining their own identity and traditions,<sup>11</sup> especially regarding food taboos. These include eating no pork and

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17. Writing at the height of the struggle against apartheid, Mafico may have intended his article to promote interracial dialogue by pointing out the similarities between traditional African cultures and those of the Bible, but it is an important scholarly article – certainly not merely a political tract.

<sup>6</sup> Mafico, “Jewish Tradition,” 19.

<sup>7</sup> Mafico, “Jewish Tradition,” 17

<sup>8</sup> Magdel Le Roux, *In search of the understanding of the Old Testament in Africa: the case of the Lemba*. (Doctoral thesis: University of South Africa, 1999), 247-248. Le Roux’s doctoral dissertation contains a large volume of detail on the Lemba culture.

<sup>9</sup> H. A. Stayt, “Notes on the BaLemba,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of*

*Great Britain and Ireland* 61(1931): 231. This article is one of the two earliest sources consulted here. It contains a number of important basic points about the Lemba culture.

<sup>10</sup> Stayt, “Notes,” 236.

<sup>11</sup> Stayt, “Notes,” 231.

eating only animals that have been killed by having their throats slit.<sup>12</sup> They practice circumcision,<sup>13</sup> although this is far from unusual among African tribes, and also have several customs involving the moon.<sup>14</sup> Van Warmelo also says there is something about their features that appears Semitic rather than African,<sup>15</sup> although statements of this kind need to be viewed with some suspicion as they may be grounded in the prejudices of their time rather than fact. The main economic activities of the Lemba, traditionally, are trading,<sup>16</sup> metallurgy including working with both iron and copper, and pottery.<sup>17</sup> There are several traditions about their origin, but almost all say that their ancestors came from across the sea, or from the other side of the “Phusela”, on a boat, or from a place called Sena.<sup>18</sup> They also say that the ancestors who came from elsewhere were only men: they brought no women with them, so they intermarried with local women.<sup>19</sup> From their oral traditions and their practices it seems almost certain that they have some kind of Semitic ancestry at some point in their past. There are three main possibilities as to what form this ancestry or point of contact may have taken: a pre-Islamic-Judaic-Arabic origin (Yemenite Jews);<sup>20</sup> an Islamic-Arabic origin<sup>21</sup> (probably the option preferred by the majority of scholars before genetic evidence was considered); and a Falasha-Abyssinic origin.<sup>22</sup> Genetic studies suggest that there may indeed be a Jewish link, and in this case the first possibility would probably be the most likely.<sup>23</sup> The Lemba themselves also prefer to be considered Jewish,<sup>24</sup> although most of them follow

<sup>12</sup> N. J. Van Warmelo, *A preliminary survey of the Bantu tribes of South Africa*. (Union of South Africa: Department of Native Affairs. Ethnological Publications. 5. Pretoria: Government Printer, 1935), 122. The section on the Lemba is only a short chapter at the end of this book, but it includes several interesting points including a note on some very unusual grammatical forms used only by this tribe, which is unfortunately not within the scope of this article.

<sup>13</sup> Van Warmelo, *Preliminary Survey*, 122.

<sup>14</sup> Van Warmelo, *Preliminary Survey*, 122.

<sup>15</sup> Van Warmelo, *Preliminary Survey*, 122.

<sup>16</sup> Stayt, “Notes,” 231

<sup>17</sup> Stayt, “Notes,” 235

<sup>18</sup> Le Roux, *The Lemba*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Le Roux, *The Lemba*, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Le Roux, *The Lemba*, 57;58.

<sup>21</sup> Le Roux, *The Lemba*, 57;63.

<sup>22</sup> Le Roux, *The Lemba*, 57;65.

<sup>23</sup> Le Roux, *The Lemba*, 60.

<sup>24</sup> Marole, L.T. *Lushaka lwa vha-Lemba*. (The Vha-Lemba Tribe). (Translated by Maringa, P.E. Unpublished, 1969), 3. Marole’s unpublished article is a primary source for this study. The motivation for the article seems to have been to educate outsiders about the Lemba people, to prevent some of their traditions from being lost, or perhaps both. Magdel le Roux’s (“Transmission of tradition through song, recitation and prayer in Lemba communities.” *Exchange* 29/4[2000]: 337-338) concentrates on oral tradition among the Lemba people.

the Christian religion.<sup>25</sup> The pros and cons of each possibility are complicated and quite beyond the scope of this study (cf. Le Roux 1999). What we can say is that it is almost certain that the Lemba have some degree of Semitic ancestry of one kind or another. Of course their ancestry is nevertheless predominantly African.

## D STUDY OF TEXTS

### 1 Lemba Text 1

The following clan list and the genealogy marked *Lemba text 3* come from Manasseh Mphelo's 1936 article *The Balemba of the Northern Transvaal*.<sup>26</sup> They are transcribed as accurately as possible. All extensive quotes from sources are provided verbatim, including any possible errors.

Clan.	Oath.	
	For Males.	For Females.
1. Mphelo	Buba	Nyahoda
2. Thobakhali	Sabungwane Thoḅa	Tsivi
3. Muthobvu	Bakgali	Bakgali
4. Raluzidzo	Manga	Kukhali
5. Madi	Madi	Nyakavi
6. Mulondje	Kunaka	Tshasiya
7. Hamisi	Hamisi	Hamisi
8. Kavi	Benga	Kavi
9. Mani	Mani	Madi
10. Ravitja	Mani	Madi

<sup>25</sup> Le Roux, "Transmission of Tradition," 331.

<sup>26</sup> M. N. Mphelo, "The Balemba of the Northern Transvaal." *Native Teachers' Journal*

XVI/1 (1936): 43. Mphelo's article is treated here as a primary source, although it is likely that he may have consulted A. A. Jaques' article for some of his information (see A. A. Jaques, "Notes on the Lemba tribe of Northern Transvaal." *Anthropos* 26(1931): 245-251).

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11. Munyayi	Hadji	Hadji
12. Mbelengwa	Hadji wa sava	Hadji wa sava
13. Sathekge or Sadiki	Sathekge	Sathekge

The first thing that needs to be said is that some other sources do not recognise the existence of a Mphelo clan. Von Sicard does not consider Mphelo's information to be fully reliable, and quotes M.M. Motenda-Mbelengwa as saying that the actual name of this clan is Malanga.<sup>27</sup> Marole, however, does write of an early Lemba ancestor named Mphelo, also spelled Mpilo – see Lemba text 4. There is also external corroboration for Mphelo's genealogy - see Lemba text 3.

There does not appear to be any parallel in early Israelite culture to this practice of having particular oaths by which the men and women of a certain tribe swear. It is difficult to see a definite pattern in the system: certainly the names are those of illustrious ancestors, but why some tribes use their own name while others use the name of a different tribe and yet others use a completely different name, is hard to tell. The practice is not identical to that of their neighbours either: Jaques says that although in other tribes oaths are commonly used, boys and girls sometimes swearing by the name of their older brother or by the name of the chief or of his son, among no other tribe as far as he knows do the clans have oaths exclusive to themselves to the extent that, as here, they may be used to distinguish between groups.<sup>28</sup>

Mphelo says elsewhere in the article that these are in fact not all the extant clans: he also refers to clans named Sathekge, Malaka and Silamulela.<sup>29</sup> It is uncertain why he does not include them in his list. One possibility is that he considered these to be offshoots or subgroups of other clans that he did list. Another is that he wanted to make the list of clans closer to 12 to parallel the 12 tribes of Israel. Von Sicard says that his informant/source Solomon Hamandishe said that there were 12 Lemba clans, but Von Sicard himself thought that this was simply a result of seeing in the Lemba traditions more similarities with Hebrew tradition than actually exist.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> H. Von Sicard, "Lemba Clans." *Native Affairs Department Annual* 39(1962): 77. Von Sicard is suspicious of Mphelo's data; however the existence of a Mphelo / Mpilo clan is corroborated by both Jaques and Marole. Von Sicard himself makes a basic error in his interpretation of the *gomboyi* saying. See below the discussion of Lemba text 3.

<sup>28</sup> Jaques, "Notes on the Lemba," 250.

<sup>29</sup> Mphelo, "The Balemba," 39.

<sup>30</sup> Von Sicard, "Lemba Clans," 68.

## 2. Lemba text 2

This clan list comes from L. T. Marole's article *Lushaka lwa vha-Lemba*.<sup>31</sup>

### **THE SURNAMES OF THE VHALEMBA OR THEIR DIFFERENT GROUPS**

Here are the groups:

Those of Mbelengwa

Those of Hamalindaphunga

Those of Bakali

Those VhaLemba of Misi

Those VhaLemba of Buba

Those VhaLemba of Nemanga

Those VhaLemba of Ngavhi

Those VhaLemba of Shinwamali

Those VhaLemba of Mpilo

Those VhaLemba of Mposi

Those VhaLemba of Salihu

Those VhaLemba of Hadzhi

Those VhaLemba of Sadiki

Those VhaLemba of Thovhakale

Those VhaLemba of Nyakavhi

Those VhaLemba of Maanii

Those VhaLemba of Malimashibwe.

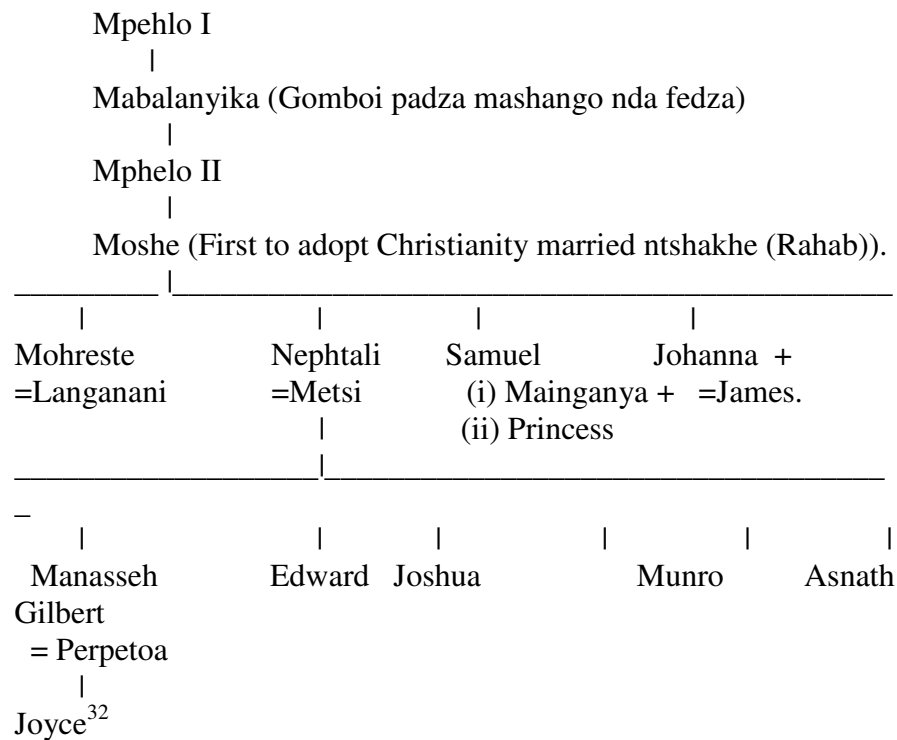
There are 17 clans in this list, and even allowing for differences in spelling (Mphelo/Mpilo, Mani/Maanii and so on), the sum of the clans in the two lists is even greater. The tradition of there being only 12 Lemba clans appears rather tenuous. An interesting point is that some of the names only known from oaths in Mphelo's list (Hadji/Hadzhi; Nyakavi/Nyakavhi) turn up as clan names in Marole's.

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<sup>31</sup> Marole, *Lushaka*, 9-10.



**3 Lemba Text 3**



As has already been mentioned, Von Sicard does not accept Mphelo’s account. However there is external corroboration for the earlier part of this genealogy in the form of a 1931 article by A. A. Jaques. Jaques had as an informant the Moshe mentioned in the above genealogy, and the account he gives of Moshe’s ancestry is identical to that part of Mphelo’s genealogy. He spells Moshe “Mosheh” and Mphelo “Mphelu”.<sup>33</sup> It is of course quite possible that Mphelo drew his information from Jaques’ article, as much of it is similar – Jaques also includes a very similar version of Lemba Text 1<sup>34</sup> as well as of Mabalanyika’s saying discussed below.<sup>35</sup> The differences are for the most part only in the spelling of various names. It seems highly likely that Jaques’ article was a major source for Mphelo’s.

It is interesting to note that this genealogy consists of only 7 generations – 6 if you count up to the author and do not include his daughter. Two other genealogies in a very similar format, but for different clans, are given in Von Sicard’s article, and they too consist of only 6 generations.<sup>36</sup> Connaway gives twelve different genealogies of various lines in his article *Herkoms, geskiedenis*

<sup>32</sup> Mphelo, “The Balemba,” 43  
<sup>33</sup> Jaques, “Notes on the Lemba,” 249.  
<sup>34</sup> Jaques, “Notes on the Lemba,” 250.  
<sup>35</sup> Jaques, “Notes on the Lemba,” 248.  
<sup>36</sup> Von Sicard, “Lemba Clans,” 70; 71.



*en genealogie van die Lembasibbes in Venda.*<sup>37</sup> The longest consists of 10 generations<sup>38</sup> and the shortest of only four.<sup>39</sup> The average number of generations over all the genealogies provided by Connoway is about 6.2. This is in direct contrast with Abraham Malamat's findings in his article *Biblical genealogies and African lineages*. Malamat finds that the usual genealogical depth (number of generations) both in Ancient Near Eastern and modern tribal, including African, societies, is ten to twelve.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, he states that

in the African lineage models only four to six generations at the bottom represent real ancestors and relationships, while the six at the top are putative. The same held true for Israel, as is evidenced by the initial generations in David's or Saul's ancestor-table, which are artificial, reflecting no more than a graduated intra-tribal division – clan, sub-clan and family.

Malamat's conclusions on the Biblical narratives have been disputed by various scholars, but Johnson, who in the second edition of his book *The purpose of the Biblical genealogies* sets out some of the problems, mentions without disputing it the assertion that the Ancient Near Eastern structural pattern for royal genealogies included the use of ten names.<sup>41</sup>

Here is a historiographical point that sets the Lemba apart from both the rest of Africa and from early Israel. Their genealogies are much shorter, falling only into the "real" segment of Malamat's model. Is it possible that this is a re-

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<sup>37</sup> H. P. Connoway, "Herkoms, geskiedenis en genealogie van die Lembasibbes in Venda." *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Etnologie* 1/2(1978): 35-40. Connoway's essay is the source of the largest number of different Lemba genealogies the author has found so far, making it very useful for statistical purposes. If it had been the only source for genealogies consisting of an unusually small number of generations (in terms of Malamat's findings), it would have been less interesting, but because Mphelo's genealogy is also short it becomes significant.

<sup>38</sup> Connoway, "Herkoms," 35.

<sup>39</sup> Connoway, "Herkoms," 37.

<sup>40</sup> A. Malamat, A. "Biblical genealogies and African lineages." *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 14(1973): 135. This source is interesting in that the statement Malamat makes about the usual length of both African and Ancient Near Eastern genealogies was very different from the findings made here on the length of the Lemba genealogies. If his assertion is indeed correct, this is an important point of difference between the Lemba and other peoples which may indicate that they have a relatively short history as a tribe.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, M.D. *The purpose of the Biblical genealogies with special reference to the setting of the genealogies of Jesus*. (Society for New Testament Studies. General editor: G.N. Stanton. 8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), xii. Johnson focuses on the New Testament, and his book was useful to this article mainly in terms of the theory of dealing with genealogies. In particular, it is used here to corroborate Malamat's assertion about the usual length of genealogies.

sult of their relatively recent origins, dating from the arrival of a group of Semites in Africa?

The Manasseh on the bottom left is the author of the article in which this genealogy is found. The different spelling of Mphelo at the beginning of the genealogy is probably a typing error rather than a genuine variant spelling. The phrase next to the second name in the genealogy has an interesting explanation, here provided verbatim:

My grandfather Maphangwa or Moshe (see genealogy) said that his ancestor Mabalanyika was nicknamed “*Gomboyi*” meaning “leg,” because he used to travel much on business. When people mocked him because he did not plough, and did not even possess a hoe, he used to say “*Gomboyi padza Mashango nda fedza*,” my leg is my hoe, I walk about to every country buying and selling.<sup>42</sup>

Von Sicard’s interpretation of this saying, in his 1962 article *Lemba Clans*, is that “the Lemba, bartering hoes travel throughout the whole country.”<sup>43</sup> He cites Mphelo 1936:42, the same source used above, but I disagree with his interpretation of Mphelo’s words. It seems much more likely that it is a metaphorical statement saying that Mabalanyika’s legs were to him as the hoe was to other people: their means of making a living. He did not farm, instead, he wandered everywhere trading. His legs, not the hoe, were the tools of his trade. This saying has nothing to do with bartering actual hoes.

This pattern, where a saying attributed to a certain ancestor is interpolated into a genealogy, occurs in the Hebrew Bible, in Genesis 4:17-24.

**Genesis 4:17-24**

וַיֵּדַע חֲנוּךְ:קִנְיָן אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּהָרָה וַתֵּלֶד  
 אֶת־חֲנוּךְ וַיְהִי בְנָה עִיר וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הָעִיר  
 כְּשֵׁם בְּנוֹ

<sup>17</sup> Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch.

וַיֻּלַּד לְחֲנוּךְ אֶת־עִירָד וְעִירָד יָלַד  
 אֶת־מְחוּיָאֵל וּמְחוּיָאֵל יָלַד אֶת־מֶתוּשָׁאֵל  
 וּמֶתוּשָׁאֵל יָלַד אֶת־לָמֶךְ:

<sup>18</sup> To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech.

וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ לָמֶךְ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם הָאֶחָת  
 עָדָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית צִלְהָ:

<sup>19</sup> Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.

וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה אֶת־יָבֵל הוּא הִיָּה אָבִי יִשְׁב  
 אֶהָל וּמִקְנָה:

<sup>20</sup> Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock.

וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יוֹבֵל הוּא הִיָּה אָבִי

<sup>21</sup> His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the

<sup>42</sup> Mphelo, “The Balemba,” 42.

<sup>43</sup> Von Sicard, “Lemba Clans,” 77.

<p>כָּל־תַּפֵּשׁ כְּנֹר וְעֹגָב:      22 וְצִלָּה גַם־הוּא יֵלְדָה אֶת־תּוֹבֵל קִין      לְיָטֵשׁ כָּל־חֲרֹשׁ נְחָשֶׁת וּבְרֹזֶל וְאַחֲזֹת      תּוֹבֵל־קִין נַעֲמָה:      23 וַיֹּאמֶר לְמֶדָּה לְנִשְׂוֵי עֵדָה וְצִלָּה שְׁמַעְנָן      קוֹלִי גַם־יָנִישׁוּ לְמֶדָּה הַאֲזִינָה אִמְרָתִי כִּי אִישׁ      הֲרַגְתִּי לְפָצְעִי וַיֵּלֶד לְחַבְרָתִי:      24 כִּי שִׁבְעָתַיִם יִקְם־קִין וְלִמְדָּה שִׁבְעִים      וְשִׁבְעָה:</p>	<p>ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe.      22 Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.      23 Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.      24 If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”</p>
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There are many other cases, such as Genesis 4:25 and 5:29, where similar interpolations are made, but these usually have to do with the parent's reasons for giving a child a certain name. This text about Lamech is similar to Mphelo's genealogy in that it interpolates a saying attributed to a certain ancestor. The fragment about Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 contains both types of interpolation.

#### 4 Lemba text 4

This text, including a genealogical fragment, comes from L. T. Marole's article *Lushaka lwa vha-Lemba*.<sup>44</sup>

##### THE DEATH OF KALAHONYE

Kalahonye lived for a long time till he was very old. When he died he left many children and grandchildren. Those we know are as follows: (1) Belengwa, (2) Tanganalo, (3) Sadiki, (4) Bakali, (5) Mposi, (6) Mpilo. Tradition says that Kalahonye Mulemba's death caused his children to remain quarelling [sic] amongst themselves. Those who were fighting were Belengwa and Tanganalo.

Tanganalo was the elder one who was born from the younger woman and Mbelengwa was the younger one who was born from [sic] the elder woman. Tradition says they fought and Tanganalo was defeated. Then Tanganalo ran away to the VhaLozwi of Vele-Lambeu. That came because Mbelengwa was being supported by all the younger brothers. Tanganalo was alone, that is why he was defeated, because Bakali, Sadiki, Mpilo and Mposi stood with Mbelengwa. Then, tradition says, Mbelengwa went to a place called Dumbwi and he gave his brothers pieces of land. In that land of Dumbwi there was a high mountain in the plains.

<sup>44</sup> Marole, *Lushaka*, 4-5.

The names of the brothers correspond in some cases with names of known Lemba clans. Mpilo is elsewhere in the text spelled Mphelo,<sup>45</sup> giving credence to Mphelo's claim despite Von Sicard's doubts. Of course, Marole's article is later than Mphelo's, so it is a possibility that Marole was influenced by Mphelo. Did the clans descend from the brothers, or was the genealogy invented later to explain the clans? Henige says, "In the records of early Mesopotamia there are several instances of lists of 'rulers' which, on closer inspection and comparison, have turned out to be lists of tribal groupings and place names. The same is true of several Biblical genealogies, the pedigrees of pre-Islamic Arabia, early Ireland, and others."<sup>46</sup> The question is which came first.

This text corresponds closely with several texts from the Hebrew Bible. It is much shorter than its equivalents, being a very recent summary of various traditions. But there are a number of salient points that are very interesting, particularly the following:

- The patriarch of the tribe has various sons who are the ancestors of the various clans.
- The brothers have a conflict.
- The victor in this conflict is not the elder brother but the younger.
- This younger brother is the son of the pre-eminent (elder) wife.

This pattern corresponds in some telling ways with the genealogical-narrative pattern found in the stories of the Israelite patriarchs. I will set out the similarities in the stories of the patriarchs.

#### **Abraham (Gen 16; 21):**

- He has two sons: Ishmael, the elder, and Isaac, the younger.
- Their conflict is not direct, but occurs through the two mothers.
- The younger son, Isaac, is considered the chosen heir.
- He is the son of Sarah, Abraham's wife, while Ishmael is the son of Hagar, his concubine.

#### **Isaac (Gen 25-27):**

- He has two sons: Esau, the elder, and Jacob, the younger.

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<sup>45</sup> Marole, *Lushaka*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 99.

- They have a direct conflict over two things, the birthright and the blessing, both of which ought by rights to belong to Esau as the older son.
- The younger son, Jacob, a trickster figure, acquires both.
- Both sons have the same mother, but, tellingly, Jacob is their mother's favourite.

**Jacob (Gen 29-50):**

- He has twelve sons by two different wives.
- One of them, Joseph, is in conflict with the rest, over his dreams which seem to say that he will be the leader.
- After many trials he prevails and becomes the father of two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh (reckoned separately in dividing the land because Levi did not receive a portion of land). Thus he receives a double portion of the inheritance, traditionally the prerogative of the firstborn. (Gen 48:22)
- Joseph is his father's favourite because he is the son of the wife whom he loves more.

**Joseph (Gen 48):**

- He has two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.
- Their grandfather Jacob crosses his hands when blessing them so as to make the younger, Ephraim, more important than the elder. He also names them in this order when blessing them.

In this narrative, unlike the others, the mother does not play an important part (perhaps she is left out of the story to some extent because she is a foreigner?)

All the texts given here as parallels are narratives rather than genealogies, and the similarity in historiography is found in a narrative paradigm rather than an aspect of genealogical writing. Do the similarities between these texts mean anything at all? It is quite possible that these similarities are due to the well-known phenomenon of feedback, where information brought into a society by outsiders (missionaries are an excellent example), is absorbed into the traditions of that society and is later repeated to historians as indigenous oral tradition.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 81.

Henige states that the two most common and influential sources of feedback are the Bible and the Qur'an.<sup>48</sup> Biblical and other scriptural themes, as he says, "appear and re-appear" in oral traditions throughout Africa.<sup>49</sup> The Lemba have been exposed to both Christian and Muslim missionary activity, and so there is a high likelihood of such feedback in their traditions. However, there are many factors, such as archaeological evidence of early trade in Southern Africa, and never forgetting the genetic study, that argue for a genuine Near Eastern origin for the Lemba. Henige is scathing about such theories: "Until recently many Africanists argued that the more advanced African states were somehow related, perhaps genetically, to Ancient Near Eastern states. If the more extravagant schemes sometimes cited are now largely disowned, pale imitations survive and sometimes flourish."<sup>50</sup>

There is one thing in favour of a genuine connection, though. Is it likely that such an obscure thing as a certain method of historiography, a way of looking at history in terms of a paradigm of a conflict between brothers where the younger brother (who is the son of the pre-eminent wife, or who is preferred by the mother) prevails, something that is likely to filter through and become feedback? And if this does happen, might it not mean that it struck a chord with the culture that adopted it so enthusiastically because it related to ideas that they already had? This seems to be the case with many of the ideas expressed by the Lemba about their origin. An important clue may be found in Mphelo's article – he says that the head of each Lemba clan is generally the eldest son of *the chief wife* of the head family.<sup>51</sup> On the one hand, this fact argues that the "son of pre-eminent wife prevails" paradigm is an intrinsic part of Lemba culture and not attributable to feedback. However, on the other hand it could be argued that this means that the narrative assumes a completely different system of inheritance from that found in the Hebrew Bible – that the leadership of the chief wife's son is *expected* in Lemba culture and *unexpected* in Hebrew culture – and that any similarities are the result of sheer coincidence. One could, however, argue that where this pattern occurs in the stories of four successive generations of patriarchs, it is not really unexpected any more.

## D CONCLUSION

There are certainly noteworthy and interesting correspondences between the historiography of the Lemba and that of the early Israelites. However, this was considered likely at the beginning of the study – the parallels between early Israelite and traditional African culture, as noted by Mafico, made that a highly probable outcome.

<sup>48</sup> Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 82.

<sup>49</sup> Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 83

<sup>50</sup> Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> Mphelo, "The Balemba," 38.



Noteworthy findings are the relative shortness of Lemba genealogies in comparison with those both of the Ancient Near East and of most modern tribal cultures, which may argue for a relatively recent founding event for the Lemba compared with their neighbours, as well as the narrative paradigm of the struggle between brothers which is won by the younger brother, born to the pre-eminent wife. This is the dominant paradigm in the Patriarchal narratives of the Hebrew Bible, and corresponds with the accepted inheritance custom among the Lemba. The case of a saying attributed to an ancestor being interpolated into a genealogy is perhaps less noteworthy – it is a stylistic feature that seems to lend itself to the genre of genealogy, and could quite possibly occur in the genealogies of very different cultures.

Is there a marked correspondence between Lemba and Hebrew Bible texts – more than the general similarities that were expected? It cannot be determined for certain whether any of the correspondences that do occur are closer than may be explained by the already noted parallels between African and early Israelite culture. However, the paradigm of the brothers, in particular, is provocative, and it might be very interesting to do a detailed narratological analysis of the texts in which this historiographical paradigm occurs.

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